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ACADEMIÆ SCIENTIARUM HUNGARICÆ

*Natural Resources and Society*

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# The Hungarian Historical Review

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## *Natural Resources and Society*

Gábor Demeter and Beatrix F. Romhányi  
Special Editors of the Thematic Issue

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Az uradalom elvesztése: Nemesi családok a 19. századi Békés megyében [The loss of the estate: Noble families in Békés County in the nineteenth century]. By Adrienn Szilágyi. Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Sciences Research Center for the Humanities, Institute of History, 2018. 380 pp.

With this monograph, which draws heavily on basic research, Adrienn Szilágyi offers several insights and conclusions which represent an important step forward in the social history of county elites in Hungary. She uses an array of methodologies and approaches in her quest to determine where the nobility of the county in the southeastern corner of today's Hungary was recruited from and how a conglomerate of large estates in the hands of a single family functioned, in particular with regard to the needs of individual family members for credit. A question also relevant to the recruitment of the nobility concerns the kinds of marriage strategies that were typically used by the county nobility.

The volume opens with a three-pillar historiographical introduction which summarizes the main findings and insights (mostly from the scholarship bearing on Hungary) in the history of the nobility, the history of the institution of the noble estate, and historical demography, primarily of relevance to Hungary. The chapter entitled “A Study of the Certified Nobility in Békés County” begins on page 39. It is the first chapter which is not essentially introductory in its function. Szilágyi draws on sources from 1730 and, in particular, the period after 1790 to determine where the nobles who came to the county (357 people) heralded from. The second longer chapter, “The Estates and Large Estate Owners of Békés County,” explains the genesis of Harruckern's “empire,” which covered five sixths of the county. Szilágyi shows how the endeavors of the Harruckern family and the workings of the county were intricately intertwined and how this remained the case in the first half of the nineteenth century. From the point of view of the social history of the local elite, the distinction of being a member of a noble family of non-Hungarian origin was important. While the group of so-called “integrated” nobles took part in the life of the county (in particular the Wenckheim and Bolza families), the so-called absentee nobles resided in Vienna and profited off the incomes of their estates, but otherwise had few ties to the county (Trauttmansdorff).

In the third thematic section, entitled “Private Administration in Public Administration,” Szilágyi presents the family networks and careers of the heirs. She offers two analyses which are important from the perspective of social history. She analyses the family gatherings of the Harruckern heirs in the period

between 1776 and 1853. This is the first analysis in the secondary literature of the system used by the family to make decisions and, essentially, function, a system which was in use for decades. As the estates and sometimes residences were in Békés County, it seems perfectly likely that the sites where negotiations were held were also in Békés County, but as of 1808, the family archive was held in Pest, as “governance from a distance hampers effective administration” (p.127). The chapter also examines how the shared elements of the estates were administrated and how their incomes were used. In the interests of cutting costs on the estates, they used officers who were paid out of common funds (two fiscal officers, one treasurer, one archivist, one surveyor, and two liveried attendants). The incomes from the commonly owned livestock went into the family coffer, and these monies could be used by the members of the family as capital available as credit, or in other words, as a kind of family bank. Thus, the members of the family were able to avoid usurers, and though they paid six percent on their loans, at the family gatherings, no one actually paid strict attention to the payment of interest or installments, so most of the money actually simply went “missing” (p.162).

One of the other interesting findings presented in the book concerns the estate structure of the county. The resettlement and revitalization of Békés County in the eighteenth century was essentially connected to one large landowning family, the Harruckern family, and this had far-reaching consequences even in the first half of the nineteenth century. Instead of a real, complexly layered aristocratic society, in the case of Békés County, we find one large client-building estate that exerted a strong influence on the county administration. The personnel and staff of the Harruckern estate and the staff of the county administration were intricately intertwined. In the subchapter entitled “Leases, or Emolument Lands,” Szilágyi offers a series of examples showing how members of the county administration could lease land from heirs as a kind of salary supplement, though these lands could be taken back at any time. As a result, there was widespread cronyism and nepotism, which, the sources suggest, may have been common knowledge, and other county members looked down on these office bearers because they were beholden to the Harruckern family.

In the fourth chapter, Szilágyi continues her discussion of this program. She presents the legal background of the sale of property in the late feudal system and then offers a history of a specific instance of indebtedness followed by sale. In the case she presents, the Stockhammer family of Moravia encumbered their estates in Békés County with all their debts. The Harruckern heirs protested

against this, but in vain. They had no money to purchase the debts, and the new legal order, which was often based on insider interests and which was considered stronger, triumphed over the old feudal order. As one consequence of this process, Móric Wodianer, a banker from Pest, came to the county as a new large-estate owner. But as an analysis of the circle of the smaller estate owners who purchased from the estates shows, these owners of smaller estates, as the followers of the families that were heirs to the Harruckerns, appeared at the family gatherings as estate attorneys, fiscal officers, and sometimes even creditors so that, as soon as the opportunity arose, they would be able to use their monopolies on information and buy themselves into the Stockhammer estates. From then on, they took part in these family gatherings, as the gains made by (for instance) Tamás Csepcsányi, Zsigmond Omaszta, Antal Szombathelyi, József Beliczay, János Hellebrandt, and Kajetán Simay illustrate.

In the last three chapters of the monograph, Szilágyi again uses more complex social history methods. While in the earlier sections of the book one of the strengths of her discussion is the thorough scrutiny to which she subjects of a body of sources which either had not previously been made the subject of study or which is simply difficult to gain access to, here her work merits praise for the manner in which she uses an array of very different kinds of sources. In the chapter entitled “The Estate Owners and Estate Relations of Békés County” she makes the prudent decision to draw on sources from the period after 1850, including for instance the 1895 statistics concerning agriculture. By doing so, she stretches the chronological range of her inquiry by another century and offers the reader a detailed portrait of the estate-owning elites of the county. In 1893, the order of the estate owners on the basis of the sizes of their estates, from largest to smallest, was the following: Wenckheim, Wodianer, Károlyi, Blanckenstein, and Almásy: “By the end of the century, essentially only the heirs to the Harruckern estate and the noble families with ties to this estate remained as large estate owners” (p.229).

In the next chapter, entitled “The Multi-positional Local Noble Elite in the County,” Szilágyi offers an analysis from four perspectives: 1) county and estate positions on the basis of cash incomes, 2) social status as reflected by forms of address, 3) the sizes of estates, and 4) the incomes of the estates. She divides the county elite into four different groups. In harmony with the conclusions she has proposed so far in her discussion, here too she confirms that the county nobility was strikingly small from the point of view of its numbers, but the new individuals who were rising to the top were increasingly dominant.

In the last chapter, which is particularly exciting, Szilágyi examines “Marital Relations of the County Lower Nobility between 1790 and 1848.” Her demographic and social history analysis persuasively refutes several conclusions which have become clichés in the secondary literature. While the earlier secondary literature suggested that there was very little exogamy in the feudal order, Szilágyi shows that in the case of Békés County, this was not the case. She examines 588 marriages, two thirds of which were held between 1830 and 1848. The marriages were usually held on site and “between nobles and non-nobles” (p.225). She summarizes her conclusion strikingly, according to which, in Békés County, “feudal exogamy and local endogamy” were common. Even in the case of the marriages among the elite in the county, only roughly half of these members of the elite had married into in the “network of relatives” (p.259).

The analyses offered by Szilágyi are consistently accompanied by useful summaries. The book also contains 29 charts, two illustrations, three maps, and a large illustration of the relationships of the family networks to the estates.

Krisztián Horváth Gergely  
Research Center for the Humanities



THE

# Hungarian Historical Review

## Aims and Scope

The Hungarian Historical Review is a peer-reviewed international journal of the social sciences and humanities with a focus on Hungarian history. The journal's geographical scope—Hungary and East-Central Europe—makes it unique: the Hungarian Historical Review explores historical events in Hungary, but also raises broader questions in a transnational context. The articles and book reviews cover topics regarding Hungarian and East-Central European History. The journal aims to stimulate dialogue on Hungarian and East-Central European History in a transnational context. The journal fills lacuna, as it provides a forum for articles and reviews in English on Hungarian and East-Central European history, making Hungarian historiography accessible to the international reading public and part of the larger international scholarly discourse.

## The Hungarian Historical Reviews

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